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REPORTS

OF THE

TRUSTEES AND SUPERINTENDENT

OF THE

Butler Hospital for the Insane,

PRESENTED TO THE CORPORATION,

AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,

JANUARY 26, 1859.

PROVIDENCE:

KNOWLES, ANTHONY & CO., STATE PRINTERS

1859





THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Printed by J. G. Thompson

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OFFICERS OF THE INSTITUTION.

1859.

ALEXANDER DUNCAN,

PRESIDENT.

WILLIAM S. WETMORE,

VICE PRESIDENT.

TRUSTEES.

JOHN C. BROWN,

JABEZ C. KNIGHT,

AMASA MANTON,

JOHN KINGSBURY,

FRANCIS WAYLAND,

SAMUEL G. ARNOLD,

AMOS D. SMITH,

RUFUS WATERMAN,

SAMUEL B. TOBEY,

WILLIAM SPRAGUE.

THOMAS P. IVES, Treasurer.

ROBERT H. IVES, Secretary.

JOSEPH MAURAN, M. D., LEWIS L. MILLER, M. D.

BOARD OF CONSULTATION.

ISAAC RAY, M. D.,

SUPERINTENDENT AND PHYSICIAN.

JOHN W. SAWYER, M. D.,

ASSISTANT PHYSICIAN.

MRS. SARAH D. LOVETT,

MATRON.

VISITING COMMITTEES.

1859-60.

FEBRUARY.....	MESSRS. T. P. IVES AND R. H. IVES.
MARCH.....	“ R. H. IVES AND TOBEY.
APRIL.....	“ TOBEY AND WAYLAND.
MAY.....	“ WAYLAND AND KINGSBURY.
JUNE.....	“ KINGSBURY AND SPRAGUE.
JULY.....	“ SPRAGUE AND WATERMAN.
AUGUST.....	“ WATERMAN AND KNIGHT.
SEPTEMBER.....	“ KNIGHT AND SMITH.
OCTOBER.....	“ SMITH AND BROWN.
NOVEMBER.....	“ BROWN AND ARNOLD.
DECEMBER.....	“ ARNOLD AND MANTON.
JANUARY.....	“ MANTON AND T. P. IVES.

☞ Application for the admission of patients may be made to one of the Trustees, or to DR. RAY, who will furnish the form of bond and all other requisite information.

*.*Letters and small parcels for the officers or patients, may be left at ABNER GAY's, No. 50, North Main street.

REPORT

OF THE TRUSTEES.

THE Trustees of the Butler Hospital for the Insane, present to the Corporation their Report for the year ending December 31, 1858.

The quarterly meetings of the Board have been regularly held, and the Hospital has been visited by a committee, once in each week, throughout the year.

The admissions to the Hospital, for the year 1858, have been forty-seven. Of these twenty-nine were males and eighteen females. Fifty-two have been discharged, of whom twenty-nine were males and twenty-three females. The number of patients under treatment, on the last day of the year, was one hundred and thirty-five. The average number for the year has been one hundred and forty and a fraction.

The expenses under the steward's department, have been \$26,732 91, and the amount charged for board of patients has been \$27,576 82. The proceeds of the farm and garden have been estimated at \$2,849 85, and the expenses \$1,056 91, leaving a balance in favor of the Hospital, from

this source, of \$1,792 96, being an increase over that of the preceding year of \$290 97.

The board are happy to announce to the corporation the receipt of the following donations from friends of the Hospital.

From a lady \$1,000, to constitute a fund for the increase of the library.

From another lady, for the general purposes of the institution, \$400.

From a gentleman, a sewing machine, of the value of \$110.

By the last mail from Europe, the secretary has received a letter from Alexander Duncan, Esq., enclosing a draft for \$10,600, which he presents as a donation to the Hospital. Although the receipt of this donation appertains to the transactions of the year 1859, the Trustees could not forego the pleasure of announcing at this time to the corporation this noble benefaction.

To one subject, which has long been a source of anxiety to the Trustees, they ask leave to direct the attention of the corporation. When the Hospital was established, it was supposed that, for many years to come, it would be able to accommodate all the insane of Rhode Island. Measures were accordingly taken to transfer to its care the pauper insane from the various cities and towns in the State. The legislature aided in the accomplishment of this design, by a very generous annual appropriation. The persons thus transferred have been found, for the most part, to belong to the class for whom little could be done beyond the care for their physical comfort. The proportion of such patients, has gradually increased, until,

at the present moment, they form a majority of the patients in the Hospital. The consequence has been that the Superintendent has frequently been under the necessity of refusing admission to persons recently insane, to whom the treatment of the institution would be of the greatest benefit. In this manner, an institution endowed with the very best means for the cure of insanity, which science, in its present state can devise, has been in danger of becoming a receptacle for incurables, to whom it can render no essential service. We are, however, happy to state that a change in this respect has already commenced. The municipal authorities of the city of Providence, on being informed of the facts, have, within a few months, transferred several of the patients under their care, to a retreat in a neighboring State. We hope that this example will be very generally followed.

The object for which the Butler Hospital was established, was specially the *cure* of insanity. To enable it to accomplish this object, no expense has been spared, and the services of the highest professional talent have been secured for the treatment of this disease. We cannot be justified in allowing such an institution to become a mere retreat for incurables to the exclusion of those whom we might reasonably hope to restore to sanity. Humanity itself demands that patients, who are, without doubt, hopelessly insane, should be removed to some institution adapted to their situation, and their places occupied by those to whom the means of cure at our disposal may be rendered available. It is manifest that some rule which shall apply to such cases must before long be adopted.

The Board hardly deem it necessary to add, that another

er year has only given them additional confidence in the professional skill of the Superintendent, and in his admirable management of all the affairs of the institution which are committed to his charge.

They commend it anew to the fostering care and the generous confidence of the people of Rhode Island.

AMASA MANTON, *Chairman*,

PROVIDENCE, January 26, 1859.

REPORT

OF THE SUPERINTENDENT.

ON the 31st of December, 1857, there were in the house, one hundred and forty patients,—sixty-seven males and seventy-three females. During the year ending on the 31st of December, 1858, there were admitted forty-seven,—twenty-nine males and eighteen females—making the whole number under care, one hundred and eighty-seven.

There have been discharged fifty-two,—twenty-nine males and twenty-three females; thus leaving in the house, 31st of December, 1858, one hundred and thirty-five,—sixty-seven males and sixty-eight females.

Of those discharged, twenty-two had recovered, seven were improved, fourteen unimproved, and twelve died.

The deaths include but one case of recent illness. In all the other cases, with one exception, the disease had existed many years.

The average number was a fraction over one hundred and forty.

The following table presents the usual recapitulation of every year's results, since the opening of the institution.

Year.	Admitted.	Discharged.	Whole No. under care.	Recovered.	Improved.	Unimproved.	Died.	At the end of the year.
1848	153	56	156	17	26		13	100
1849	93	86	193	35	24	7	20	107
1850	73	67	180	19	26	5	16	113
1851	68	54	181	26	8	4	16	127
1852	101	86	228	30	36	5	15	142
1853	92	98	235	44	27	5	22	136
1854	80	85	216	40	20	6	19	131
1855	56	50	187	20	15	4	11	137
1856	58	53	195	14	18	5	16	142
1857	37	39	179	15	10	4	10	140
1858	47	52	187	22	7	14	12	135
	861	726		282	218	59	170	

The steady diminution in the number of admissions, for the last six years, as exhibited in the above table, might convey the impression, at first sight, that insanity is decreasing in this community. The fact, however, has more connection with our capacity of accommodation, than any change in the prevalence of the disease. We long since reached that stage in the progress of every establishment of this kind, where the old, incurable cases have accumulated to such a degree, as to shut out some of recent occurrence. We have been obliged during the past year, by a painful but inevitable necessity, to decline such cases, even when brought to our doors, more frequently than ever before. On the male side, where the pressure has always been less, we have declined to receive but few, and those of a custodial character alone, but on the other, we have received not a third part of the cases that have been offered. Some of these have resorted to the hospitals of the neighboring States, but they too, for the most part, have reached the utmost extent of their capacity, and their doors must soon be closed against applicants from abroad.

What is to be done, under these circumstances, is a question which deserves the most serious consideration, but the present may not be the most proper occasion for discussing it. The subject, however, suggests some reflections which, if turned to a practical account, might diminish, in some degree, the frequency of that calamity which, in spite of all our philanthropy, has steadily outstripped the means that have been devised to mitigate its evils; and for this reason they may appropriately occupy our attention at this time.

Facts like these just stated, have often raised the question, whether or not mental diseases are increasing, and it is one of the deepest interest to all who are disposed to believe in the indefinite progress of the race. If, year after year, the amount of human happiness and the capacity of improvement have been seriously diminished by this steadily increasing evil, it is the part of wisdom to learn the fact and provide the remedy. On the question itself touching the increase of insanity, opinions have been much divided. Nothing would seem to be easier than to settle it, by comparing the number of the insane with that of the whole population, at periods somewhat remote from each other. But this supposes a fact that does not as yet exist. In no part of the world has a census of the insane been taken, at two different periods, with any reliable degree of accuracy. Indeed, the attempt has seldom been made at all. Estimates founded on partial returns embracing a single district or denomination of people, have been occasionally made; but, being vitiated by that uncertainty which must always exist, where inferences take the place, in some degree, of actual facts, they can be of little worth in deter-

mining any practical question. It deserves notice, however, that every successive estimate of this kind has showed a larger proportion of insane, than any previous one. Thus, it has risen, in Great Britain, from 1 in 7000 to 1 in 300; in France, from 1 in 1750 to 1 in 1000; in the Rhenish Provinces of Prussia, from 1 in 1000 to 1 in 600. In the United States, the proportion appears to have risen, during the period between 1840 and 1850, from 1 in 978 to 1 in 738. In Massachusetts, where the attempt has, several times, been made with unusual care, to ascertain the number of the insane, the same result has been observed. In 1847, it was reported to be 1 in 606, and in 1854, 1 in 300. In this State, the census of 1850 showed the proportion of 1 in 633; while in the same year, private inquiries found it to be, at the very least, 1 in 351.

These results may only indicate the greater accuracy which repeated investigations generally produce; but if they do not show an appalling increase of the disease, they do show an amount of it, which, a few years since, before its dimensions were so carefully measured, would have been regarded as almost incredible. When we consider, in this connection, the well authenticated fact, that the prevalence of insanity is proportioned somewhat to the degree of cultivation and refinement which the people have reached, the conclusion seems to be inevitable, that much of it originates in the incidents and conditions peculiar to the civilized state. The laws of physiology might have led us to expect this result. The judicious use of an organ, we know very well, increases its power and confirms its health, but excessive exercise—that which requires an undue share of the vital energies—leads to an unhealthy condition. Every advance

in civilization implies additional cerebral effort. The proportion of those who use their brains for anything beyond the ordinary functions of life, is increased by it; and with this fact is necessarily found another, viz., that the proportion of those who, in one way or another, use their brains immoderately or injudiciously, is also increased. It would hardly seem to require an elaborate investigation to prove that, other things being equal, the mind which only directs the hand in the coarser operations necessary to the mere support of life, will be less liable to disorder than one which feels the spur of higher motives and provides for a higher circle of wants. The brain of the savage partakes of the common exemption from disease shared by his stomach, heart and lungs. It knows little of that severe tension which the civilized man's endures, and which tends to create a morbid irritability easily converted into disease.

We are not to forget also, that, under the appliances of civilization, the normal hardihood and elasticity of the brain are rather diminished than increased, so that it often fails, less in consequence of the magnitude of its efforts, than of its feeble power of endurance. This kind of enfeeblement it shares in common with the other organs, and it would be as idle to deny the fact, as it would to deny that gout, consumption and enlargement of the heart, are indicative of that vital deterioration produced by the luxuries and trials of civilized life. It certainly will not be denied that the standard of health has been somewhat lowered among us, during the last fifty years; and such being the case, we have no reason to suppose, other things being equal, that the brain alone has escaped the general fate. But other things are not equal. In addition to the deteriorat-

ing influences which affect all the organs alike, the brain, as we have already remarked, is subjected to a strain which has been steadily increasing with the increasing wants and excitements of life. And here we must bear in mind, what is sometimes practically forgotten in discussions of this subject, that the brain is the material instrument, not only of reason, but of the emotions, sentiments and propensities. Through it come joy and sorrow, the triumph of success, the pang of disappointment, the spur of ambition, the storm of passion, the love of the good and the beautiful, and the peace and trust of religion. Were man merely a reasoning animal, the amount of insanity that might be produced by hard thinking would be comparatively small. And even were we to embrace in this immoderate exercise of his great prerogative, the close and protracted attention often required in his various pursuits, there would still be a large remainder of mental disorder to be traced to some other exercise of mind.

Strangely enough, in the face of this distinction, some persons can see, in the influences of civilization, only the stimulus it affords to the thinking faculties, and find, as they imagine, that communities abounding in minds thus exercised will favorably compare, in point of mental health and vigor, with others comparatively exempt from the labor of thinking. It appears, for instance, from recent statistics, that the rural districts of England furnish a larger proportion of insane than the manufacturing, and on the strength of this fact, is put forth the doctrine, not altogether new, however, that the increased mental activity which accompanies every advance in civilization, is really favorable to mental health. "The Hodges of England," it is said, "who

know nothing of the march of intellect, who are entirely guiltless of speculations of any kind, contribute far more inmates to the lunatic asylums, than the toil-worn artisans of Manchester and Liverpool who live in the great eye of the world, and keep step with the march of civilization, if they do but bring up its rear."* This explanation is not quite satisfactory, because the statement on which it rests, is rather a matter of rhetoric than of actual fact. The toil-worn artisans of Manchester and Liverpool are, probably, as guiltless of speculation as the Hodges of the rural districts. There is nothing in the occupation of making the head of a pin, or driving a steam-engine, more conducive to mental activity, than shearing sheep or holding a plough. The extreme division of labor now introduced into most manufacturing processes, and the narrow range of attention consequently allowed to the operative, most effectually preclude any exercise of thought; but the labors of agriculture, with all their supposed monotony, are still not without variety, and, every hour, require the exercise of judgment and discretion. The fact in question has been observed in this country. From the Census taken in Massachusetts in 1854, by order of the Legislature, it appears that the rural counties of Berkshire, Hampshire, and Franklin, have a much larger proportion of insane, than the manufacturing and maritime counties of Suffolk, Essex, and Plymouth. Nobody here, certainly, would think of explaining this difference by supposing that the mass of the population in the former districts have less intellectual activity, than that of the latter. Hodges, no doubt there are, who become insane from mere mental torpidity, but they are not confined

*London Quarterly Review, April, 1857.

to the rural districts. Unquestionably, the number of those who think closely and continuously, seeking to elaborate some new idea, is greater in the commercial and manufacturing districts; and this might explain their comparative exemption from mental disease, were it the only point of difference between them. Some of the elements of the problem are yet to be learned, perhaps; but in regard to one of them, probably the most important of all, we know enough to warrant the belief that it has much to do with the prevalence of insanity in the agricultural districts of Massachusetts. Their population is comparatively fixed and uniform, and little diversified by immigration. Large numbers are born, live, marry and die on the same spot. Matrimonial connections are confined to the neighborhood, and this inevitably leads to much mingling of common blood. In some towns this process has been carried so far, that a few leading names comprise a large portion of the inhabitants. The effect is the same in kind, though not in degree perhaps, as that which has been witnessed in the domestic animals from a similar cause, viz., a deterioration of the qualities of the stock. It is well known that the desirable points of a breed can be maintained only by frequent infusion of foreign blood; and that the breeder who never goes beyond his own estate for the means of continuing his stock, will find it at last deprived of its excellencies and reduced to the level of the common herd. In the human race, the nervous system particularly suffers under this deteriorating operation, and the effect is often manifested in imperfection of the senses, or idiocy, or insanity. Matrimonial connections between near relations have been regarded as improper from the earliest times, on this account, but

the same unhappy results may be produced by the steady repetition of smaller infusions of common blood.

All this is very different in prosperous cities and villages, where the vicissitudes of business lead to considerable changes of the population. A large proportion of it has been brought together, within a recent period, from distant points, and this movement is constantly going on. In their matrimonial alliances, the choice is not confined to a very limited circle, but extends over a wider range, embracing a greater variety, not only of blood, but of stamina and temperament. We find the same results in the maritime districts of those old communities, where the decay of business has led to a stationary population. They show no lack of intelligence, and facilities of traveling prevent unusual stagnation of mind; but a large proportion of their marriages involve some mingling of common blood. But to return from this digression, which, though apparently out of place on this occasion, became necessary, in order to meet a formidable objection to our views.

There prevails some confusion of ideas as to the manner in which this unfavorable effect of civilization on the mental health, is produced. Hard thinking, or mere thinking of any kind, unless immoderately prolonged, seldom of itself produces insanity. Although the most powerful intellect may unquestionably give way under immoderate efforts, yet there are agencies far more potent than this in disturbing the healthy balance of the mental faculties. Life is full of influences and incidents productive of strong and especially of depressing emotions. Joy and sorrow rapidly succeed each other; the future, which, to-day, is all light and sunshine, to-morrow is enveloped in clouds and dark-

ness; the dreams of ambition are not fulfilled; the cravings of avarice are never satisfied; the best laid plans of advancement are defeated; the lofty heights on which the eye delighted to dwell, one after another fade away from the sight; health, strength and troops of friends are replaced by infirmity and bereavement; year after year slips by and no great object of life is secured. In short, every additional power or resource conferred by civilization, becomes of necessity an occasion of disease, under a suitable conjunction of adverse circumstances. When we consider the increasing multitudes whose pursuits expose them to every variety of emotion; whose daily experience, from youth to old age, is an uninterrupted round of mental agitation; it ought not to surprise us that the victims of insanity have multiplied to a startling extent. Could we banish the extremes of joy and sorrow, anxiety and disappointment, and inaugurate a state of passive indifference under all the allotments of life, we should no doubt, to that extent, diminish the prevalence of mental disease.

The indirect influences of civilization upon the mental health, are not less pernicious than those which bear directly on the mind. The arts of luxury, the refinements of pleasure, the privations and discomforts of poverty, with its bad air and deficient, unsuitable food, fashionable habits and practices—these are agencies which exhaust the vital energies and prepare the way for numberless disorders of body and of mind. The “ill-health” so common among our people as to have become a social institution, frequently involves the brain and nervous system in the morbid process. This effect may not always appear in some form of insanity, for it is now witnessed with frightful frequency in

various cerebral affections, which blast the mental faculties and shorten existence. The frequency, unparalleled in any previous time, with which men in the prime of life and the full maturity of their powers, suddenly break down, and, after hovering awhile around their customary haunts, disappear forever, is obvious enough to the most careless observer. Paralytic affections, which once were comparatively rare, and attributable, in a great measure, to sensual indulgences, now occur in multitudes who have always been regular and temperate in all their ways. Indeed, were we to indicate that feature in the medical constitution of our times which distinguishes it from all others, it would be our large proportion of cerebral affections. In view of these facts, and bearing in mind, too, that every form of nervous disease is more or less propagated by hereditary transmission, it seems impossible to resist the conclusion that every advance in civilization has been accompanied by an increasing proportion of mental diseases.

This may seem hardly compatible with those notions of the dignity and progress of the race, which seem to be founded in the instincts and experience of men; but, on the other hand, it may be fairly questioned whether the evil in question, is necessary and inevitable, and whether like other evils dependent on human frailty, it may not be removed or diminished. In a great measure, no doubt, the remedy is within ourselves, for much of the evil originates in habits and opinions that have no better support than the fashions and prejudices of the times. The difficulty is to make people regard the matter in this light,—to recognize an error which ministers to their pride, vain-glory, or some other selfish sentiment. But the difficulty is not so great, that

we need refrain, on any suitable occasion, from bearing our testimony against the unhealthy practices of our times, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. I have no intention of going over the whole ground which the subject presents, for that would require a volume, but will ask your attention to one of our institutions which, while scarcely inferior to any other in the amount of mischief which it produces, is not beyond the reach of correction.

Much of the prevalent mental infirmity may be fairly traced to the popular modes of education, which bear the characteristic marks of the spirit and temper of the times. The brain, which is the material instrument of the mind, is fearfully and wonderfully made, exhibiting a delicacy of construction, a nicety of adjustment, and a power of adaptation, of which the most ingenious works of man can give us only the most feeble conceptions. Unlike them, it possesses intimate relations with other organs, and its action is modified by the changing conditions of age, health, culture, climate. The springs of its movements are utterly unknown, and while we are astonished at the results, we are profoundly ignorant of the manner in which they have been brought about. And yet the exercise of this organ, endowed with so many wonderful faculties, is generally managed with the least possible regard even to those few conditions of its action which we happen to have learned. Whoever would use a piece of nice mechanism, utterly regardless of the directions furnished by its maker, would be considered as guilty of consummate folly. And yet, with the brain this folly is not only committed every day, but is mistaken for the highest wisdom. To say that the amount

of lesson and task-work imposed upon the young while at school, is always or generally determined by a careful consideration of the laws of physiology, and a scrupulous regard to the results of experience, would be to utter the broadest possible irony. To know what amount of work may be safely put upon the youthful brain, having reference to age, constitution, and endowment, would seem to be a matter of paramount importance, to be determined by all the light derivable from experiment and observation; but practically it is made subordinate to another and a very different question, viz., how much will satisfy the public,—that public which mistakes the glitter of display for solid acquirement, and measures the skill of the teacher by the rapidity with which the pupil is pushed forward. The radical fault is the same which characterizes our movements in other departments of effort. We grudge the time a sound education necessarily requires, and are impatient to turn the acquisitions of the pupil to some practical account. Discipline and developement may be theoretically recognized as legitimate objects of education, but practically they are regarded as subordinate to that which predominates over all others, viz., the means of distinction which it gives—the medals, prizes, honors. These are to be obtained if possible, and obtained quickly. Here, as everywhere else, speed is the only test of merit. Lesson is piled upon lesson, the hours of study are increased, and the active, irritable brain of tender youth is habitually forced to the utmost power of effort.

The amount of daily mental task-work that may be safely required of the young, in the process of education, must

vary somewhat with differences of natural endowment and vigor; but a little examination of the subject will show us the limit beyond which there is imminent danger. Men who have long been accustomed to write books, and experience a certain pleasure in the exercise, unite in declaring that five or six hours a day in the labor of composition, year in and year out, cannot be profitably exceeded. An occasional excess may be committed with impunity, but any attempt to make it habitual would be followed by some form of nervous disorder, as well as a depreciation in the quality of the result itself. Sir Walter Scott, than whom few literary men have possessed larger powers of endurance, in consequence of a naturally strong constitution, good habits of exercise, and a cheerful tone of mind, emphatically declared that six hours a day was the utmost limit of his performance; and the correctness of his statement was painfully verified in the latter part of his career, when the desire of retrieving his fortunes induced him to exceed this stint. The melancholy result is known to every one; and it forms a chapter in literary history, unsurpassed by any other in its deep, tragic interest. His health soon suffered, and that noble intellect which seemed almost beyond the reach of blight or decay, utterly broke down and passed away. There are men, no doubt—tough, hard-headed men—whom no amount of intellectual labor seems to worry. They rise fresh from the severest efforts, always ready to begin again, and live on to a ripe old age, while younger and apparently haler men have been falling around them. These are men of a thousand, whose feats may be admired but cannot be imitated. If, then, five or six hours of daily

work is sufficient for the adult brain, it is a fair inference, certainly, that a longer period cannot be allowed in the tasks of the youthful brain.

It may be objected to this conclusion, perhaps, that the exercises of school require no such strain upon the mind as the effort of composition, especially as the former are chiefly a matter of memory, and not original creation. There may be something in this, but not enough surely to forbid the inference we have drawn. These lessons of the child are not merely to be committed to memory and repeated, but they are to be understood if possible, and this implies the exercise of the higher faculties of the mind. In the study of languages, for instance, the meaning of words, the relation of one word to another, the force of expressions, frequently cannot be ascertained without reference to cognate words and expressions; and amid a multiplicity of suggestions, some effort of sagacity is required in order rightly to choose between them. In the study of mathematics too, those truths which seem so obvious when once they are worked out, cannot be mastered without a concentration and continuity of attention, which imply effort and fatigue. In mental science, also, if the performance of the pupil is to be anything better than a parrot-like repetition of what is contained in the book, there must be an effort of abstraction and introspection which, to a young mind totally unaccustomed to such an exercise, is no easy work. Besides, in the two cases supposed, it is to be considered that the writer has the advantage of familiar practice, takes easily to his work, and the toil is lightened and cheered by the hope of substantial reward. Unless, therefore, we greatly misapprehend the nature of the connection

between mental activity and the organic condition of the brain, we have a right to conclude, that the youthful powers may be not less severely tried by five or six hours' attention to the above-named studies, than the adult mind by the practice of writing for the same period. But this is not all. The young and the adult brains possess very unequal capacities of application and endurance. It is the law of the animal economy that the various organs do not arrive at their full maturity of vigor and power, until some time after the adult age has fairly commenced. To suppose the youthful brain to be capable of an amount of task-work which is considered an ample allowance to an adult brain, is simply absurd, and the attempt to carry this folly into effect must necessarily be dangerous to the health and efficiency of this organ.

Now let us look at the particular facts in the case, and see what amount of labor is habitually imposed upon the young, in the shape of school-exercises; how much time must be spent upon them by the mass of the pupils in order to obtain a respectable standing in the school; and what is the effect of all this effort on the mental health.

Six hours a day, for the most part, is the allotted school-time in this part of the country. Occasionally we find it five, and as often, probably, seven. The rooms, with some rare exceptions, are badly warmed and badly ventilated, the thermometer ranging, in winter, from 55 to 80, and the air contaminated by the respiration of one or two hundred pairs of lungs, and the impurities that arise from a leaky, overheated stove or furnace. The time not devoted to study is occupied in recitations, or exercises that require a considerable degree of mental activity. To accomplish all

the tasks, the regular school hours are seldom sufficient, and more or less time must be given to study out of school. It may be a single hour; it may be two, three or four. The time will be determined by the amount of the tasks; by the ambition, capacity, or excessive anxiety of the pupil. With quick-witted children who have no very strong desire to excel, and those who have neither desire nor capacity to excel, it is short. On the contrary, with the sluggish but conscientious intellects, with the ambitious who strive for distinction, and the morbidly sensitive and timid, it is long. However this may be, it is none the less a veritable fact, that in New England, to go no farther, more or less study out of school is the general rule for all except the very youngest scholars. This has been sometimes questioned, if not positively denied, upon some show of authority perhaps, but on very unsatisfactory grounds. The statements of a host of parents who must be supposed to know something of the occupations of their children at home, and of physicians whose professional duties often oblige them to make careful inquiry on this subject, would seem to leave nothing wanting in proof of our assertion. If particular facts are required, nothing can be better than the actual lessons, which will furnish every one the means of judging for himself whether the tasks can be accomplished in school. Here are the lessons for a single day, given out a week or two since, in a public school, to a class of girls from twelve to fifteen years old. I have no reason to doubt that it is a fair specimen of the daily work of the class. I mention no names, because they are immaterial to the point in hand.

In Leach and Swan's Arithmetic, the 13th, 14th and 15th examples on the 181st page, and four extemporary.

In Greene's First-Lessons in Grammar, the 149th page as far as the 6th sentence, to analyze.

In Smith's Quarto Geography, the Physical Geography of Europe.

In Leach's Spelling-Book, the 59th and 60th pages, [containing 162 words of two or three syllables.]

School-time 6 hours ; average time occupied in recitations, 2 hours.

Here again is a day's work, taken at random, of a more advanced class of girls, from fourteen to seventeen.

In Brockelsby's Astronomy, about 2 pages.

In Davies's Geometry, the 8th 9th, and 10th propositions of the Fourth Book.

In Poitevin's French Grammar, one page and ten verbs.

An exercise in composition once a fortnight.

School-time 5 hours ; time occupied in recitations, from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 hours ; in general exercises and recesses, 1 hour.

The following were the lessons for a single day, a week or two since, assigned to a class of boys from twelve to fifteen years old.

In Sherwin's Algebra, the 5th section.

In Worcester's History, one page in advance and two reviewed.

In Fasquelle's French Course, lesson 12th ; review exercise 13th, three irregular verbs.

School-time 6 hours.

These may be considered as average examples of the amount of work now put upon the youthful brain. They are the first that came to hand, but I have reason to believe that additional statistics of this kind, would oftener show a larger than a smaller requirement. They will enable every one to judge for himself, with sufficient accuracy, whether the strain to which they subject the mind, is or is not compatible with the highest degree of healthy endurance. In the first example, there is required, out of school, according to the statement of one of the class, a girl of average intellect, about two hours of study a day—sometimes more and sometimes less—making an aggregate of eight hours. In the second, the time given to study out of

school is estimated by one of the class, standing at or near its head, to be from three to four hours. In the third, the history and the French are studied out of school. How much time this would take, any one may judge for himself.

In connection with this matter of out-of-school study, it must be considered that much of it is pursued in the evening, often until a late hour—a practice more pernicious to the health, in youth or adult, than any other description of mental exercise. The brain is in no condition for sleep immediately after such occupation. The mind is swarming with verbs and fractions and triangles, and a tedious hour or two must pass away, before it falls into a restless, scarcely refreshing slumber. Jaded and dispirited, it enters upon the duties of the day, with little of that buoyancy which comes only from “nature’s sweet restorer.”

Thus it is, that in all our cities and populous villages, the tender mind is kept in a state of the highest activity and effort, six or eight hours a day, for several years in succession, with only such intervals of rest, as are furnished by the weekly holiday and the occasional vacation. Sunday can hardly be admitted among these intervals, for that day also has its special school, with its lessons and rewards. In other words, it is subjected to an amount of task-work, which, estimated merely by the time it requires, is greater than what may be considered a proper allowance to a cultivated, adult mind. Let us now look at the effects of this immoderate mental effort on the health of the mind.

No doubt the greater part of the pupils go through the process without any appreciable damage whatever. They proceed from one study to another, rapidly accumulating their acquisitions, and finish by knowing a little of every

thing, and no one can point out any impairment of their physical or mental health. Whether this kind of discipline is best calculated to promote the future vigor and efficiency of the mind, is another and a very important question, which it forms no part of my present purpose to discuss. Upon a portion of the scholars—comparatively small, no doubt, though larger than it is generally supposed—it is just as unquestionably disastrous. The proximate causes of this result are various. These youths may not have possessed the stamina of others; their nervous system may have been unusually irritable; or some moral motive may have induced them to prolong the hours of study to a limit beyond the power of the stoutest constitution to bear. However this may be, there remains the stubborn fact, that, in one way or another, they are suffering from excessive mental application.

The manner in which the evil is manifested is not very uniform, but however various the results, they agree in the one essential element of a disturbed or diminished nervous energy. It rarely comes immediately in the shape of insanity, for that is not a disease of childhood or early youth. It impairs the power of concentrating the faculties and of mastering difficult problems, every attempt thereat producing confusion and distress. It banishes the hope and buoyancy natural to youth, and puts in their place anxiety, gloom, and apprehension. It diminishes the conservative power of the animal economy, to such a degree, that attacks of disease, which otherwise would have passed off safely, destroy life almost before danger is anticipated. Every intelligent physician understands that, other things being equal, the chances of recovery are far less in the studious,

highly intellectual child, than in one of an opposite description. Among the more obvious and immediate effects upon the nervous system, are unaccountable restlessness, disturbed and deficient sleep, loss of appetite, epilepsy, chorea, and especially a kind of irritability and exhaustion, which leads the way of a host of other ills, bodily and mental, that seriously impair the efficiency and comfort of the individual.

I have said that insanity is rarely an immediate effect of hard study at school, but I do not doubt that it lays the foundation of many a later attack. When a person becomes insane, people look around for the cause of his affliction, and fix upon the most recent event apparently capable of producing it. *Post hoc propter hoc*, is the common philosophy on such occasions. But if the whole mental history of the patient were clearly unfolded to our view, we should often find, I apprehend, at a much earlier period, some agency far more potent in causing the evil, than the misfortune, or the passion, or the bereavement, or the disappointment, which attracts the common attention. Among these remoter agencies in the production of mental disease, I doubt if any one, except hereditary defects, is more common, at the present time, than excessive application of the mind when young. The immediate mischief may have seemed slight, or have readily disappeared after a total separation from books and studies, aided, perhaps, by change of scene; but the brain is left in a condition of peculiar impressibility, which renders it morbidly sensible to every adverse influence.

In these remarks, I am far from imputing blame to teachers or any other class of individuals. The real source and support of the evil in question, are to be found in a wrong

